

## Harry Potter's Life Lessons

One shot. AU of PS/SS. The Dursleys have done one good thing for Harry Potter's continued safety: their neglect has made him suspicious, sneaky, and cruel. A brief explanation of how things might have gone differently. Includes DH spoilers. Amoral!Harry.

A/N: I get a bit peeved when I read AU's of the Philosopher's Stone where everything happens as JKR wrote it, save for one or two cosmetic things. If it's an AU, then things should change. Here's my attempt at a brief Year 1 story.

Edited 8/10/08

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The young Harry Potter learned much of the world while he lived with Muggles. In fact, before he ever learned of the Wizarding World and Hogwarts, he knew all the most important lessons.

He knew about pain. He got beaten by Dudley and sometimes Vernon, too. This didn't make Harry excessively cruel, no, it taught him cunning and evasion, how to avoid being seen by Dudley. How to hide from Vernon even in a small home.

Harry got punished when 'freaky' things happened, which just made him more curious about the world, 'freaky' and otherwise. He learned to be more subtle about his curiosity.

How could he turn a teacher's wig blue? Or 'jump' onto the roof of the school cafeteria? These were not ordinary things – as time passed, Harry noticed more and more of them. He also managed to keep them to himself, but he never stopped wondering about how this was possible.

He got terrible grades as long as he attended school with Dudley. But his decision was merely to avoid punishments. Harry learned well to hide his abilities and knowledge. Harry was far from stupid or lazy. He was polite, bright, a bit shy, and far more normal than a downtrodden child should be.

There was an inner core of fire inside him, a massive well of power, anger, and hatred.

The thing that he learned from most – and that fuelled his anger and hatred – was seeing that no one cared about or even noticed his undernourishment, his bruises, his unexplained absences from school, or his unjustifiable reputation as a bully. The teachers didn't care; the local bobbies didn't notice; the neighbors thought he was some kind of criminal; the hospital he visited for a broken arm didn't do anything with their knowledge.

The people who were supposed to protect him didn't.

He thought himself a Dickensian orphan awash in incompetent 'adults'; he was the only grown-up around for miles it seemed. *Oliver Twist* was a kind of favorite story for Harry. Harry certainly felt hungry enough most days to identify with the author's orphan.

All that allowed Harry to articulate his first true insight into the world. Life Lesson Number One: Adults couldn't see what they didn't want to see.

Harry became a master at using 'adult blindness' against those around him. The Dursleys thought him stupid, so they never noticed how bright and clever their nephew was. How observant, too.

Teachers thought him a loner, middling in his studies, and completely quiet, so they never challenged him or thought about him. Not even the school librarian noticed how much Harry read during his odd free moments. Even at the age of ten, Harry was already planning for his escape from the 'adults' who couldn't see beyond their inflated noses.

Harry was an extraordinary planner. He didn't imagine himself an astronaut or a fireman or a boy with parents who loved him. Harry planned for real things.

He planned for the day when he got the Dursleys arrested, all three of them. He planned for the day when he made sure all the teachers and administrators who knew of his abuse got publicly accused of

ignoring and condoning the child abuse. When he could ruin their lives by making true accusations on the BBC news.

Harry planned for freedom and revenge.

He'd made detailed plans: he documented everything the Dursleys did. He made photographs of his injuries. He got his sparse records from the hospital using a properly adult request by letter. Harry had the whole plan down: he'd wait until he was of an age where he could be emancipated. Where his case wouldn't send him back into the clutches of people who could be even worse than the Dursleys. Life Lesson Number One would work for him this time: teachers and neighbors didn't want to see abuse, but some lawyers and judges saw only that kind of behavior everywhere they looked. Given enough evidence, Harry knew there was a special kind of adult who would believe him, who would help him.

It was a brilliant plan. But it changed, of course, when he learned he was a wizard on his eleventh birthday.

Harry then began to put some pieces together after he returned from Diagon Alley with Hagrid.

--The Dursleys had known about magic, had known and hated it. Did that explain their beastly conduct all these years? They beat a child they feared – didn't they realize what a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' was? Harry would have been grateful for a loving family; now he looked at the Dursleys as rabid dogs waiting to be put down. They had made it inevitable that Harry would punish them most severely for their conduct.

Harry began to adjust his plans for revenge. He wouldn't need to bring adults into it. He could use magic, couldn't he? The Dursleys would regret every hurtful word, every day of hunger, every broken bone or black eye or bloody nose. Harry would determine the very best way to handle their reward.

--Someone or several someone's from the wizarding world had dumped him here, had abandoned him to pain and misery for a

decade. No one had checked on him or prepared him or helped him in any way. Harry would find and thank this person or persons.

--Harry had some kind of unfounded reputation in this bizarre alternate world: the Boy-Who-Lived. The truth was probably closer to the Boy-Who-Wasn't-Killed-by-Stupid-Muggles.

Harry planned to keep his head down a bit longer, see what was what, and absorb everything he could. One learned more from listening than speaking. No one could use something you hadn't said against you.

Harry read all of the books that he'd purchased while with Hagrid. He especially enjoyed Hogwarts: A History. It was more a story about the entire wizarding world than just about a school. There were stories of famous graduates inside its pages (complete with numerous ideas for careers Harry could take up after he'd dealt with the Dursleys), explanations of the entire educational system and how OWLs and NEWTs were handled, and a brief section on the 'recent' history of the school, covering the last fifty years. Here Harry even found a vague reference to his parents and their 'sacrifice for the Wizarding World.'

Harry realized then that the same would be expected of him.

But, Harry decided, here was Life Lesson Number Two: He did not care enough about anyone at this point to sacrifice himself for them.

The Wizarding World was not prepared for this kind of Savior, was it? It had indirectly made him this way through the hubris and neglect of a few of its powerful elder statesmen, but it wouldn't like what it received in return.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

September 2

Harry had just finished a brief, thoroughly strained conversation with the school librarian, Madam Pince. The witch had a mind like a trap, but the personality of a rabid fox. The scowls and bitter words she'd

used. He'd only been asking about if she remembered his parents when they were students – it wasn't like he'd been coloring in her books or eating the pages.

Finally he'd arrived at the right questions to ask. "I wonder if you remember my mother's favorite books, or at least the subjects she liked. Mr. Ollivander said her wand was particularly good for charms..."

The starched woman sighed and relented a bit. Orphans who came to Hogwarts, more and more in the last few years, had plagued her and others for remembrances of their missing families. But at least this question Irma Pince could answer.

"Yes, Lily was quite gifted in Charms and Potions. By the time she was Head Girl, I swear she'd been through most of the books in here, but it was always the household charms books she looked for first when she returned at the beginning of a school year. She grew up the Muggle way and was most fascinated with the things she could directly compare with her Muggle life..."

Harry smiled brightly, thanked the sour woman, and went to fetch a number of those volumes from the shelves. After more than an hour of reading, Harry was impressed. He knew from extensive personal experience how challenging setting out a table-full of dishes could be – or cooking a pot roast and all the trimmings – or cleaning room after room by hand – or pulling weeds in the scorching afternoon sun. Magic was wonderful!

But it also began to fill in his picture of his mother: a bookworm, bright, curious, somewhat politically talented (Head Girl as a muggleborn!), able to make an impression even on the sour librarian...

He had plenty more questions to ask now. He hadn't heard anything at all about his father yet, had he? Pince certainly scowled, though, when he'd mentioned James Potter.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

September 9

“...no, you dunderheads, you’re supposed to mince the earwigs and slice the cobbleroot. Do it wrong and your potion will turn as grey and watery as your miserable brains.”

Harry had never heard a teacher behave as horribly as this one here did. This was their second class with Professor Snape and it was obvious the man was little better than an emotional three-year-old throwing a tantrum.

Did no one complain about the man?

Harry got that question answered hours later in the Gryffindor common room when he began asking some of the older students about Snape.

“God, I dropped the class as soon as I could, Harry,” Oliver Wood explained. “I want to play Quidditch professionally, so I didn’t need it. But a lot of my friends are having to reevaluate their careers, you know. No healers, no Auror training unless you get a Potions NEWT. And that’s just about the smallest NEWT level class there is. Maybe five or six students per year in the seventh year course...”

“No Gryffindors, maybe a Hufflepuff. Otherwise evenly split between Slytherins and Ravenclaws. He’s a menace,” said another boy Harry didn’t recognize. “I’m doing private study after I graduate and then taking the NEWT the next year. My parents are both Healers and have been complaining about that man as long as I’ve been a student here. He’s possibly the worst thing about this school...”

Good, so Harry wasn’t the only one who thought so.

Why was the vicious man allowed around children? Were wizards even blinder than Muggles? This was a school that parents paid tuition to – if a core class was so poorly instructed, you’d think threats of removing children would have an effect.

Harry just scowled when he thought of Snape. A few plans began to form in his head, as well.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

September 17

Harry had found out loads more from some unlikely sources. It was nice to know his parents even a little bit, but such innocent questions also gave Harry a reason to assess his teachers, to see if they were the typical sort of 'adult.'

The Charms professor Flitwick had a lot to say about both his parents, especially Lily's gift with a wand. But he seemed surprisingly mute on certain topics, like anything related to his father.

McGonagall had shared a stingy amount, although she had granted that James Potter had a true gift for Transfiguration. She didn't tell Harry anything personal about him.

"What made him laugh?"

McGonagall's face went starchy white at that question. "I'm sure I don't remember, Mr. Potter."

Harry tried but couldn't get much else out of the old teacher. He wondered if she truly didn't remember – or if she was holding back for some other reason.

The real prize information came from Hagrid and Filch, both of whom in their own ways told Harry more than he could have expected. Whatever kept Flitwick and McGonagall from sharing much clearly wasn't at work with these two.

Hagrid's many stories just came flowing out of his mouth as if the poor man couldn't stop talking. Hagrid told Harry about his father's animagus form, which James Potter had thought a secret but was known to Hagrid and a few others.

"Your dad thought he was so sneaky hidin' out from ol' Slughorn as a deer in the forest. Like Dumbledore and McGonagall didn't know exactly who he was and what he was doing. It made 'em laugh, so they let him get away with it."

Hagrid let slip a small amount about James' friends but without names or details (just in Hagrid's general nebulous way of thinking about things), about the different kinds of mischief they'd gotten into, and about his father's multi-year attempt to court Lily Evans. All of it made Harry smile at the child-like, yet still massive man.

Harry began to paint a portrait of his father: funny, brash, rule-breaking, a lover and a fighter, alternating in his cruelty and his mirthfulness.

Filch's stories, on the other hand, were structured more along the lines of angry diatribes. That was where Harry began to learn the depths of hatred between his father and his current Potions instructor. Harry quickly made a sort-of ally in the caretaker. He wanted to know more and more about his father and his friends.

"...and that no good Black friend of his..."

"Black?"

"Sirius Black, just another one of a bunch of inbred bigots..."  
Listening to Argus Filch required more than a bit of filtering to isolate truth from prejudice, but Harry filed away the name for further study.

Eventually, Filch even showed Harry some of the detention cards that had been filed about his father and his friends. More names to study: Remus Lupin, Peter Pettigrew, Frank Longbottom, Harrell Wood, Constantine Spinnet. Perhaps the back issues of the Daily Prophet would have more to share.

Harry was glad he'd learned not to stop digging at the surface of the problem. The most rewarding things came from unlikely places. Argus Filch possessing anything of value – unlikely, but true.

Harry's innocent routine worked on just about anyone he tried it on.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Early October



Harry had learned that the art of invisibility – that of ‘adults’ being unable to see anything that they did not want to see – applied in both the magical and Muggle worlds. The case of Sirius Black was one such exemplar.

The world at large apparently expected even a Gryffindor Black to eventually show his evil side, so they weren’t shocked or appalled when it happened. When he ‘betrayed’ his friends and got them killed; when he proved that a Black was always a deceitful Black.

To Harry, it sounded more than a bit like how Harry was deemed a bully and a miscreant in his aunt and uncle’s neighborhood. More ‘adult’ lies; more wish fulfillment.

The newspapers archived in the library clearly reported he’d been sent to Azkaban, but never reported on his trial or conviction. That smelled bad to Harry, as had everyone’s reticence (save Argus Filch’s) to speak to Harry about Sirius Black.

Harry wrote a letter to the Ministry of Magic requesting more information on the trial of the man believed to have betrayed his parents. When he got a polite non-answer, Harry sent both his original letter and the Ministry sop off to the major newspapers. He enclosed just a brief, polite note. Sometimes fame had its advantages.

“Dear Sir or Madam, I am very interested in learning more about my family’s history. At this time, the Ministry of Magic has declined to release the transcripts for Sirius Black’s trial in 1981. I would like to read them to learn the truth about what happened to my parents and me that awful Halloween night. I would appreciate any assistance you could provide in helping me, and your reading public, obtain this information. Sincerely, Harry Potter.”

On that sunny October 3rd, the whirlwind started.

The Prophet reported nothing, as befitted a well-greased government mouthpiece. But Witch Weekly had an interesting profile on the non-trial of Sirius Black and Harry Potter’s quest for information, as did the Quibbler and four other magazines.

Days later, articles began on why the Prophet wasn't reporting on this important news story. Then reporters everywhere began digging into the Prophet and the Ministry of Magic. It quickly came out that the Minister of Magic had three people on his staff referred to as 'censors' who monitored everything the Prophet was planning to print; 'censors' who felt free to excise articles that painted the Minister or the Ministry in a bad light.

Harry sat back and watched. A few days later, it became common knowledge that the three censors had been fired once their identities became public. It was quite a lot of fun watching 'adults' tearing themselves to pieces.

It took two more weeks before the Prophet said anything about Sirius Black. And that was only after much international ridicule. It was a brief article buried in the back pages: "Sirius Black to be Tried in Front of Wizengamot on Thursday." The powers-that-be decided it was preferable to get rid of all this embarrassing speculation by trying the insane, obviously guilty man.

Harry, as the primary surviving aggrieved party, wanted to attend just out of curiosity. What did Sirius Black look like? What would he say? What really had happened that night – and just why hadn't Sirius Black had a trial up to this point? Harry fully expected the 'adults' to try to ignore anything bizarre about the situation, but perhaps a flock of curious journalists could help turn the situation around.

Harry let it be known he would be attending the trial in person. Once the newspapers reported that the Boy-Who-Lived would be in attendance, the school was obligated to let him go.

It also ensured that the media would be there...and that there would be a minimum of 'funny business,' to quote Uncle Vernon's incisive wit.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

October 31

Harry decided that most of the children who had grown up in the wizarding world were as great of fools as the 'adult' witches and wizards.

Sirius Black had been freed three days ago – and had immediately claimed jurisdiction over his godson, Harry Potter.

The vast majority of the children at Hogwarts promptly seemed to fear Harry as if he were the second coming of Morgana le Fay. The only thing keeping down mass terror was the story that Sirius was still at St. Mungo's recovering from his time in Azkaban.

Idiots!

That was why he was hiding out in the library with a few other people while the Halloween Feast was in full swing. He'd sneak down to the kitchens later. Harry had wandered the entire castle several times by now and knew most of its secrets – the kitchen he'd found by observing a few Hufflepuffs sneak in one night just before curfew. Was that the reason so many of them seemed to have a bit more round the middle than the other children at Hogwarts?

Harry flipped a page and continued reading his book. He thought it an appropriate title for that particular evening.

Harry never heard that there was a troll in the dungeons.

Because Hermione was sitting next to him studying away, rather than sitting in a bathroom stall crying over what Ronald Weasley had said to her after Charms, she never ran into the troll.

However, the Slytherins who left the Great Hall, fleeing toward the dungeons did stumble across the beast. A sixth year prefect threw a couple of first years toward the troll to protect himself. Greg Goyle got a busted leg and Daphne Greengrass was clubbed unconscious. But that prefect, Ambrosius Lestrange, didn't stop the troll. He was the first true casualty of the evening as he was soon without a head.

After seven more were clubbed or otherwise injured, the seventh year students together managed to send enough stunners to immobilize

the beast. Lestrangle, Pansy Parkinson, Marcus Flint, and Octavius Westridge had all lost their lives by that point. Eighteen others spent at least one night in the Hospital Wing, many trampled by their own terrified classmates.

Harry, who'd been reading a thick volume about wizarding legends such as the Chamber of Secrets and other gory stories, didn't hear any of this until breakfast the next morning.

The school was in shock. The Slytherin table seemed positively deserted. The remaining first, fifth, sixth, and seventh year students looked inconsolable at the deaths of their fellow Slytherins.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

November 2

"Hem, hem." The short, ugly woman had to stand on an upturned bucket in order to be seen at the front of the Great Hall.

"Because of the recent tragedy, the Minister has appointed me to come and take up the post of High Inquisitor to determine why this senseless tragedy, the loss of so many good pureblooded witches and wizards, why this occurred on the Headmaster's watch. Particularly why he sent all of you children out of the safety of this hall and into the chaos outside. I assure each and every one of you, I will come to some firm conclusions and will take appropriate actions!"

Dolores Umbridge stepped off her upturned flobberworm bucket and seated herself, taking up two chairs at the head table for her squat body. Harry eventually heard that poor Hagrid had been forced to take his meals in the kitchen for the duration of her stint at Hogwarts. It was arguably because Dolores needed the space, but more likely because of her horrifying remarks about 'half-breeds.' Hagrid really was quite sensitive about his ancestry.

Dumbledore had a vacant, grieved look on his face. Was he mourning the dead students – or this Ministry imposition on his fief? Harry wouldn't care to wager either way, but he was leaning toward

Dumbledore's sadness being a mask for his anger over the Ministry functionary being in his school.

Harry had taken one look at the lady and knew she was trouble, but that she wasn't gunning for Harry. No, she had her bureaucratic eyes elsewhere. Harry had seen many, many people like her in the Muggle world. Working on a private grudge, using her official powers to wreak some personal justice.

Hadn't Vernon gloated over the way he demoted and hurt the other would-be applicants to the position he'd achieved at Grunnings? Wasn't it the way of all 'adults' to scramble after power and prestige?

Harry could read her like a book. She had it in for Dumbledore and Quirrell. He also recognized that Dumbledore was too powerful a target for a full-out campaign, aside from outraged remarks.

She'd eventually go after Quirrell, but she had no idea what Quirrell really was. Harry himself only had the vaguest notion. But Quirrell was composed of evil now, no matter what he once had been. Harry could see the black tendrils coming out of Quirrell's body, out of his head. He had been able to tell things about witches and wizards ever since he'd first visited Diagon Alley. The stuttering Professor had gone from a deeply gray aura to the blackness he had at present...he had changed.

He was vicious and cruel. This Umbridge would learn that at her peril.

Harry ate his breakfast and wasn't scared of this bland, vicious sounding bureaucrat. There were only three people at Hogwarts Harry was cautious about. They were the ones who didn't allow Harry to become truly invisible at Hogwarts: Snape, Quirrell, and Dumbledore.

Snape loathed Harry: that much was obvious. So Harry tried to play dumb. He melted his cauldrons in alternate weeks and handed in almost indecipherable essays every class. Oh, the wonderful rants Snape engaged in; Harry enjoyed listening to them at times.

Snape was little better than Vernon Dursley, so Harry already knew how to play that game. The problem was that Snape seemed to never stop observing Harry when they were in the same place. He hated Harry as the Dursleys did but he never stopped thinking about Harry, obsessing about him, while Vernon was more of the “out-of-sight-out-of-mind” school. A very odd creature, someone completely motivated by blind, unyielding hatred.

Snape was dangerous and would have to be dealt with.

Quirrell stuttered worse when around Harry and pretended to be a fool. If Harry was a good actor, he was an even better judge of character (after years of torment at the hands of the Dursleys and other assorted bullies, Harry possessed finely honed instincts in a number of areas). As much as Snape glared at Harry, Quirrell stuttered and stared, but always at Harry.

There was a deep intelligence lurking in those eyes, even something fiercely evil. Plus his dual kinds of darkness. Harry had come across a number of references to the Dark Arts in library. He was planning to start researching the topic of possession later in the week. There was something about Quirrell...and Harry vowed to find out what it was exactly.

Failing that, he would ensure Quirrell was no longer a threat.

And, then, Dumbledore. He never looked at Harry, but somehow Harry knew that Dumbledore knew much of what Harry did. The portraits as spies, that was obvious. The house elves, too, perhaps? Or the ghosts? Or the castle wards? Whatever it was, it didn't matter. Harry was beginning to unravel a number of mysteries surrounding this deceptively batty old man – crazy as a fox maybe, but not dotty. His barminess was as cultivated as Quirrell's stutter. So many actors in the wizarding world – how many dared share their true faces?

Dumbledore knew everything Harry wanted to understand, but Harry wasn't yet ready to approach the old wizard. Not yet, but soon. There were contingencies to plan for.

Harry knew the true faces of Snape and Quirrell, but hadn't yet decided about Dumbledore. And he also knew Life Lesson Number Three: Bullies, thugs, and enemies only respond to indisputable, overwhelming force. Corollary Number One: Never attempt to negotiate with them, it just tips your hand too early.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

November 3

Harry's first lesson with Quirrell after Umbridge showed up was quite fascinating and amusing. She had apparently been spending a lot of time with him, observing and attempting to provoke him.

The fat bureaucrat was reading a poster on trolls that Quirrell had plastered to the side of his classroom. She clucked like a hen and made notes on a clipboard she carried with her.

Harry could swear he was almost able to read her thoughts as she scribbled away. 'He was the first one to identify the troll.' She seemed particularly angry at Quirrell because he identified it and didn't stop it, even though troll wrangling was supposedly one of his specialties.

Then she turned around and began to interrogate the Professor in front of his class.

"So, sir, you were the Muggle Studies teacher before you took this post?"

Quirrell stuttered for a few seconds before getting out a "yes."

"So, please tell me, what does studying vermin have to do with studying Defence?"

The class, at least the non-Slytherins, rolled its eyes at the woman. She was as foul mentally as she seemed physically.

"I've fought off vampires, madam," he stuttered back at her. "I am fascinated with Muggles and monsters both, plus the Dark Arts and how to defend against them..."

Harry thought his teacher's veneer slipped a bit. He actually sounded smart in those few moments.

"How would you handle a troll? I read a few tips on that poster of yours, sir. Certainly you wouldn't scream about it in front of children and create a panic..."

Quirrell began stuttering violently again. His words made almost no sense.

"...and your abominable conduct – inciting a school-wide panic! – cost the lives of some of our best and brightest pureblood families, old and worthwhile families. Consider yourself suspended, Mr. Quirrell, while we investigate further. Consider yourself restricted to the castle as well: I want to keep a close eye on you. As for the children, I will be bringing in a special replacement in the meantime."

And, so, in the door walked Gilderoy Lockhart. Dolores Umbridge sighed a bit, although her sigh sounded a bit like breaking wind. To a group of eleven year olds, it was quite humorous.

Quirrell fumed on the way out of the class, while Lockhart began bragging about his credentials, something about an Order of Merlin, Third Class. Harry had also met people like this Lockhart before.

Harry was quite gifting at sniffing out liars. Lockhart didn't know the truth, didn't know the path to the truth, and didn't even realize that other people could see behind his thin veneer. Harry rolled his eyes and stayed silent.

The door slammed after Quirrel was evicted. Harry wondered what Quirrell would do about the situation.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

November 6

"It was horrible. My friend's older sister, Bonnie Cotillion, was the first one to discover it..."



“I can’t believe it. I read all his books. He would never do such a thing....”

“All his years fighting evil must have twisted his mind a bit, like a battle-hardened Auror going off the deep end.”

Thus went the stunned gossip at the Gryffindor table.

Harry ate a piece of orange and wasn’t at all surprised when he heard that Madam Umbridge’s appointment to fill the Defence position had been found with wand in hand over her dead, beaten, mutilated corpse in one of the girl’s lavatories.

“He claims not to know a thing,” Oliver Wood said. Then he snorted.

It was rather impossible to believe. Lockhart couldn’t seem to remember anything about the circumstances – or about his life in general, even his own name. Or so he was rumored to have said.

Harry ate some more – a salad and a piece of chicken, things he rarely got at the Dursleys, who were obsessed with fried foods and hated vegetables – and listened.

The gossip mill reported that Lockhart’s wand was filled with obliviation spells, along with numerous bludgeoning and bone breaking curses. It seemed he had tortured the Ministry flunkie for a good long time – part physical torture, part mental torture of having her memories erased while she was forced to participate in selecting what she lost – before she finally died. The rumor mill decided that Lockhart had accidentally obliterated himself.

Harry could barely hold back his laughter at that. He had a good idea of what had really happened. True, he was a student of human nature and logic, a rare combination in the Wizarding World. It was clear why others were believing the rather odd evidence.

Harry, on the other hand, was even surer now of the evil that lurked with Quirrell’s body. Harry didn’t attempt to explain what he thought

he knew. He was still listening and observing for now. Quirrell was waiting on something, so Harry would be content to wait for him to act first.

Of course, Quirrell resumed his former duties. That was clear by dinner time. Dumbledore couldn't find anyone else under the circumstances and the strangely timid man was all too grateful to have his old job back. The Ministry sent in Aurors – Harry caught sight of them as he was eating a peach for pudding – to investigate Umbridge's brutal slaying. The Prophet from the next morning would report that Lockhart had a fourteen minute trial before he was sent to Azkaban. It really was too bad he wouldn't have any memories for the dementors to torment him with.

The furor over the deaths by troll died down over the next week as no one could be convinced to come to the school and serve as the new High Inquisitor (seemed a rather dangerous undertaking, after all). The Ministry settled back into its usual simmer of incompetence. Only the riled-up members of the Board of Governors seemed to care as several of them had lost family members in the attack.

They began showing up in record numbers at random moments.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

November 14

Harry loved flying. There was no doubt about it. He loved flying about as much as he loved to breathe.

However, he found he didn't care all that much about Quidditch. He hadn't grown up with the sport and didn't really understand, even though he was on his house team as a first year. He definitely didn't like Slytherins on brooms or bludgers in any form. Why was such a dangerous game still played? Couldn't the magical world have adopted soccer? Harry hadn't followed any teams but he did like playing it in grade school.

Plus, Harry was rather annoyed at the rules that were broken for him so he could play. A hundred year old rule, to be exact, prohibiting first

year students from owning brooms or playing on House Quidditch teams. Either the rule was important and shouldn't have been broken for anyone – or the rule was dumb and no one should have to follow it. His head of house shouldn't be able to pick and choose that way.

Ah! More ridiculous favoritism because of his damned scar. It was either favors and ridiculous praise or outright hatred and unmerited discrimination. Couldn't anyone see he was just a slightly confused kid? Couldn't anyone treat him as if he were a normal eleven-year-old child?

Harry shrugged off the thought and pushed his broom downward. He was soon racing at more than one hundred twenty kilometers per hour nearly straight toward the ground. Then he suddenly pivoted and shot off in another direction.

What a rush! If only the entire world was like flying.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

November 25

Harry commandeered an abandoned classroom – one far away from portraits or other fixed spies within the castle – for some of the potions practice he desperately needed. He obviously wasn't learning anything in Snape's class, not since he purposefully melted every third or fourth cauldron he touched. So he worked on his own time to learn about potions and brewing them. Snape hadn't explained anything about proper ingredient preparation so Harry taught himself. It wasn't too difficult without the pressure of Snape staring at him with a mocking sneer on his face.

He was working on two cauldrons at the present moment. Normally he brewed first or second year potions, like he was supposed to be learning. Today the potions he was working on were more advanced and could prove useful to solving his Quirrell problem.

The books he'd read on possession had demonstrated a number of symptoms of long-term possession: stuttering was one of them as was, of course, considerable personality change. A man teaching

Muggle Studies who enjoyed visiting Albania on vacation had turned into a stuttering wreck afraid of his own shadow who looked down upon the Muggleborn – that was a true personality transplant, if the older students were to be believed. Something that was not meant to be a teacher currently had control of Professor Quirrell – something like that meant danger for Harry Potter. Harry didn't care for people aiming at his head.

The books had suggested a number of potions for handling possession of this sort. One two-potion cocktail seemed especially appropriate: the Draught of Living Death and the Elixir of Petrification. Neither one was particularly tricky or complicated to make, even though they were NEWT level because of their dangerous properties. It wasn't designed to expel the possessing spirit; no, it was designed to trap it inside its host, to keep it bound.

He decanted the cauldrons shortly before lunch. He had six portions of the Draught of Living Death and enough elixir to petrify three people. Good thing it would keep for years.

Harry had his plans in motion. But he still needed more information.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

December 1

Harry was outside playing in the snow after his classes. It was the first time he was really allowed to play in it. He formed up a ball of it and sent it flying toward Fred Weasley. Splat!

In retaliation, both brothers formed up their own snowballs and sent them flying. Harry ducked one but the other one impacted against his right shoulder. From there, with all the accidental targets, it became a free-for-all as more than thirty children started pelting each other without rhyme or reason.

Utter chaos, pure delight.

Harry found himself laughing, covered in snow, and freezing. It was wonderful. He hadn't laughed like this...well, in forever.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

December 12

Harry finished his final exam of the term and walked alone up to the Great Hall. He was hungry and not in the mood to argue over test answers with Hermione, listen to the latest Chudley Cannons player transfer story from Ron, or try to determine exactly what Neville kept stuttering on about. Man-eating plants, probably, or something that shot out sticky flesh-dissolving pus.

Harry was looking forward to seeing Sirius again in four days. His godfather was out of St. Mungo's now, his malnutrition repaired and his mind back into a reasonable state of disrepair. Harry wasn't one for the authority figures, but in the time he'd spent with Sirius, he found that he was more responsible than the big goofball who was supposed to be looking out for him. Harry thought he could handle the man – and that Sirius could handle him. Sirius wasn't exactly an 'adult,' was he?

Harry stepped into the Great Hall and saw an odd looking sort of person seated at the head table. He looked like a parched, grown-up version of Draco Malfoy. The father, probably, or a close relative. Probably a nervous school Governor. But he seemed dangerous. Life Lesson Number Four: People or things that might be dangerous always are.

Harry stared and stared at the man while he ate.

Harry could see the evil around the man, just like he could see the dual magics in partial conflict inside Quirrell. But this Malfoy's evil had a different sort of dual varieties. One seemed to wrap around his whole body, while the other variety, much stronger and fiercer, centered around his upper chest. Was he carrying something on his person?

Harry watched as the evil Malfoy left the table and walked down the aisle. He seemed to stumble briefly over someone's bag. He bent

down and when he stood up again, the second evil aura was missing. Harry looked toward the bag. Whatever it was now lived in the bag.

Harry got up from his half-eaten meal as soon as that revolting man left the hall. He walked over to where Susan Bones sat and asked her a couple of questions about the prior day's Herbology exam. Then he bent down to tie his shoelaces and plucked the black repulsive book out of her bag. He tucked it into his robes while he thanked her and then walked out of the Great Hall.

He was still hungry, but holding this disgusting, foul book close had made him lose his appetite.

When he entered his dorm room, he found himself alone and strangely compelled to begin writing in what turned out to be a blank diary. But Harry could see the foul magic surrounding the book. He resisted the temptation. Then he turned to one of his finds from the library: On the Enchanting and Disenchanting of Objects. Harry had been curious as to how one made a Sorting Hat, but now it seemed this book would be appropriate for his current dilemma as well. He flipped quite a few pages in the thin, ancient book and came across the section on disenchanting. It listed forty-seven different methods, each one more appropriate for certain circumstances, some for metal, some for gems, some for textiles, wood, or glass. None for leather and paper: apparently people didn't often enchant books. So Harry decided to follow suggestion number forty-seven.

"Given a hot enough flame, nearly any enchanted object will be consumed by fire."

So, over the next three days, Harry virtually locked himself in the library researching fire spells, high level fire spells. He finally found a couple, but they seemed well beyond his present ability. Harry noted their particulars on the closing day of term and decided he'd use this as a kind of test for his godfather. A simple, mysterious request – would Sirius honor it, would he question it?

Harry smiled.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

December 22

“...so I saw an adult Malfoy leave this in a student’s bag. I went and swiped it because I could see how foul it was. Can you set it on fire for me? I don’t want anyone else stumbling across such a nasty item again...”

“Malfoy? Lucius Malfoy?”

Harry shrugged.

“Anything he’s attached to can’t be all that good, Pup, especially not if he’s hiding it like that. Sure to be mayhem of some kind... Sure, I’ll burn the damned thing for you. It’ll be like poking a stick in my dead mother’s eye, too, and that horrible cousin of mine who married Lucius. Oh, yes, I’ll help.”

Sirius and Harry had spent the last few days in the Black Family Mansion getting comfortable with each other. Harry had spent a good few weekends with Sirius while his godfather had been recovering at St. Mungo’s. But this was the real test. Could they co-exist together?

Yes, so far, the answer was yes. Sirius was a good person, not corrupted like the rest of the ‘adults.’ He had a profound sadness to him, but he was real. He saw the world as it really was.

And he was also willing to get involved in mysterious undertakings. Harry liked him more and more.

The diary burned in the small garden-area behind the house for almost five minutes before a horrifying wail sounded through the night. The evil enchantment on the book must have been destroyed.

Sirius had a wolfish grin on his face. Was it a love of rule-breaking? Or a desire to hurt the Malfoys? Either motivation was acceptable to Harry at the present moment.

The next day they torched a variety of other dark objects in the old mansion. A golden locket also seemed to make a vicious keening wail as it burned.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

December 25

Harry unwrapped the first Christmas presents he'd ever received and felt happy at his new lot in life. He still thought 12 Grimmauld Place was an odd sort of house, dirty and dark, even though Harry and Sirius spent time every day cleaning it together. Sirius had clued him in on a secret: its Unplottability meant Harry didn't have to worry about Underage Magic laws.

So, practicing magic with an 'adult' was nice, even domestic cleansing magic, as were the new things Harry received. New clothing, the first Harry could remember receiving. A card for an eye appointment, the first in six years or so. A couple of books on mischief-making of various types, awesome. Candy and junk to take back to Hogwarts to trade for favors, useful and necessary. And a strange billowy package that did not reveal its giver, but contained an old Potter heirloom, an Invisibility Cloak.

"That was James'... Oh, that cloak, the stories I could tell you, Harry."

Harry smiled and laughed. "You will, Sirius. You'll tell me every single one, I know it."

"You got that right, Pup. Every one."

Sirius launched into one of their exploits involving the Slytherin dorms and rooms and rooms worth of boxers that dissolved a few hours after they were touched.

"It was a self-replicating curse. Any boxers that came into the dorms for weeks were infected with the spell. It was incredible to see so many uncomfortable Slytherins, freaked out, always looking around the corners to see who was hexing their boxers off them. The curse... Oh, it was grand. Even Slughorn had to take off points from his



Slytherins and hand out detentions for boys leaving shredded boxers around in the hallways. No one could ever prove it was us or that any spells had been used at all. Time-delayed pranks, a true thing of beauty...”

They both laughed before Harry steered the conversation back to more serious topics.

“So, why did the Headmaster have this, then?” The sender hadn’t identified himself, but Harry could read the signs.

Sirius’ face darkened. “Nothing Albus does would surprise me now. As bad as that Barty Crouch, isn’t he? Left me to rot in prison without a trial...”

And here began Harry’s education on wizarding politics and history. He heard about Bagnold, Crouch, Dumbledore – all those faces upholding ‘justice’ and then about Cornelius Fudge.

“They sound like the usual kind of ‘adults’ I’ve met before,” Harry said. “Why is the Headmaster worse?”

“Because I fought for him in the war. Because he knew I would never betray my friend James. Because he stuck you with those filthy muggles. I never held with the Black family beliefs on pureblood supremacy, but I could see my way toward a bit of Muggle baiting and torture right now. Want to take a visit to Little Whinging, my Pup?”

Harry shook his head and smiled.

“After the Daily Prophet printed all those stories about my relatives, I don’t think I have to worry about them. Enough nasty wizards already hate Muggles, so I figure someone else will take the time to visit Privet Drive...”

Sirius smiled, a bit sadly, but he laughed nonetheless. It seemed he’d rather be the one to take some revenge.

“Maybe Lucius Malfoy will pay them a visit and get caught after he’s finished torturing them. Take care of two problems at the same time, you know?”

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

January 11

“Now, we will be working on wood-to-glass transfiguration starting today.”

Thus started another plodding lesson with Professor McGonagall. Harry performed the transfiguration quickly and then sat the rest of the class bored out of his skull. For such intensive classes, it made no sense to have only a single teacher for so many pupils. Couldn’t the school afford more teachers?

Come to think of it, Harry had no idea how much a year at Hogwarts cost. Probably a pretty sickle. Was all this worth the cost? The amount of time he spent here? The severe level of aggravation? The constant looking over his shoulder to avoid a hexing from one of the green-and-silver squad?

He’d come to this place originally out of curiosity, out of a desire to see what magic was and understand the world he should have grown up in had his parents lived. Well, and there was the whole fact of escaping the Dursleys several years earlier than he had originally planned.

Harry was ripped from his contemplation by a rather stern talking to happening right one seat over from his.

“How did you turn your oak board into yeti fur, Mr. Weasley? It’s supposed to be a bit of glass, almost like a mirror, see that one Ms. Granger produced... How do you expect to ever turn a tea cup into a grandfather clock if you can’t make this simple transfiguration work correctly? You really must look into getting a more appropriate wand. That particular item seems quite dangerous in your hands...”

Harry smirked to himself.

“Now, you will come and speak with me this evening at 8:00... No, sorry, teachers’ meeting then. Mr. Weasley, you will come to my office tomorrow morning at 7:30 and we will discuss this, shall we?”

Teachers’ meeting. Interesting, Harry thought. He’d have to make notes about when the teachers of the school met together.

“...no, no, Mr. Longbottom. I don’t know what you are doing to turn your oak board into a green monstrosity – what kind of plant pod is that? – but it seems you also are using an ill-suited wand. You will come to my office tomorrow evening after supper. Straight after supper, Mr. Longbottom.”

Harry had to be careful observing the teachers at their meeting tonight. Somehow Dumbledore seemed to be able to detect him moving around underneath it. But was he seeing Harry? Or watching footsteps? Or reading magical auras? Or was there a spell of some sort he was using? His initial research into invisibility cloaks and how they functioned and how to circumvent them had turned up pretty much nothing: they were extremely, extremely rare it seemed.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

January 23

“Sir, I wonder if you could tell me about my parents. I’ve asked around quite a bit with the people who were here when my parents were and most everyone mentioned you were close to them...”

Albus Dumbledore smiled at the small boy seated across his desk. It was his best disarming smile.

He’d felt a bit of discomfort when he’d received an owl message from young Harry asking for an appointment to talk about his family. He’d do his best to soothe the boy, after all he knew a lot of what damaging truths Sirius and Argus Filch had probably told him.

The truth was best left in the hands of adults, adults that Dumbledore trusted. Sirius Black, unfortunately for his plans, was not among the

people Dumbledore trusted, even with his recently proven innocence. Dumbledore didn't know if he could set little Harry back on the proper course. At the least, he had to try.

"Yes, Harry, I knew them well. Good people, both. Head Boy and Head Girl, you know. I still remember that beautiful autumn day when they got married to each other..."

"And what were they like? As people?" The bashful act Harry was using ensured he never quite looked Dumbledore in the eye. The boy had heard too many stories of Dumbledore seeming to pluck information out of people's mind. There were only vague references to Legilimency in the library, but Harry was cautious all the same. Who knew what someone as ancient as Dumbledore could have learned to do?

Albus smiled softly. "Your father, James, had a brilliant smile that often lit up his face just before he got into some kind of trouble. He was smart, but he enjoyed making other people, his friends at least, laugh and enjoy themselves. He was a good friend, Harry, above all else, he was loyal and dedicated to his friends. And your mother, she was a wonderful witch. She was quieter than your father, a bit stern, I thought, and very dedicated to her small circle of friends and to what I remember her calling 'justice.' She was very fair minded, defender of the underdogs, you see. Also a very good trait, a protector..."

Harry was wincing inside. He could see why some people liked this Albus fellow. He appeared an amiable rambler when, the entire time he was speaking, he was actually cherry-picking the qualities he wanted to discuss, the ones he wanted to instill and develop in Harry. Harry thought the man was terribly obvious – why did no one else?

"Like her standing between my father and Professor Snape and their rivalries when they were all was in school?"

Dumbledore's careful smile faded. "I had hoped you wouldn't be aware of their problems, young Harry. For those are problems in the past, not things we should resurrect."

Harry blinked at the stupidity and blindness of the man. Snape had obviously never put a single problem to bed. He was still nursing and tending to every one. And inflicting his bile on Harry and the other Gryffindors to this present moment.

Harry decided to push forward.

“Where did they live, sir?”

“Live? Oh, Godric’s Hollow for the last few months, near to some Potter family ancestral lands, but there aren’t any buildings standing any longer, I fear. Although I think they had you when they were living in an apartment in London...”

“What’s Godric’s Hollow like?”

“Oh, yes. It’s sort of a mixed wizarding and muggle community. Quite a charming place. Best green grocers in the Isles. Some beautiful parklands. I grew up there myself, many, many years ago. Oh, the stories I could tell you...”

Harry noticed that this Albus didn’t really tell stories he didn’t want to, he just talked about the fact that there were stories. He utilized quite a few of the standard arsenal of ‘adult’ defenses: it was sad really.

“What did they do? For work...”

Albus seemed to dip his head as he considered the question. This Harry really had prepared a full battery of questions. Damn, he seemed more like a Ravenclaw than a Gryffindor. It wasn’t at all what Dumbledore had expected.

No, no. Dumbledore realized he should have brought Harry into his office and put a stop to all this wondering a long time ago. Given him interpretations and tidbits and nuggets that would have been perfectly satisfactory for an older boy, enough to end the curiosity and the searching. Now the boy had entirely too many facts at his disposal – and probably confirming facts from many different sources. What a problem.

Could he use a few judicious Memory Charms at the end of the year before returning the boy to the Dursleys? He'd have to get to Sirius Black as well... Hmm, it was a challenge.

Albus nodded his head to suggest he'd been thinking. "Your mother worked for the Committee on Experimental Charms at the Ministry, a fine mind she had. Your father, if I remember properly, had quite a mess to handle sorting out all of the details with the Potter Estate, but he seemed to have settled on the idea of starting on a Transfiguration apprenticeship, you know, for his Mastery, at least until they had to go into hiding during the war..."

"The Potter Estate? What's that, sir?"

"The Potter name is an old one – and fairly well to do. You can take some electives on business and financial management taught by the goblins during the summer months after your fifth and six years, if you'd like. But James never did, so he was thrust into the management of a rather large estate without the proper background..."

Harry frowned a bit thinking of his own situation. Was it proper background for a wizard to be raised amongst Muggles, especially ones as vile as the Dursleys? Or proper never to be told anything true and accurate about his family until he was eleven? And did this 'adult' ever actually answer a question in a direct way? He'd have to ask Sirius for more information about the Potter Estate. The goblins at Gringotts seemed like they'd be as tricky to deal with as this Dumbledore fellow.

"I've heard from some other people that my parents didn't seem to get along very well their first few years at school. Did they ever tell you how they got over their dislike of each other?"

Dumbledore smiled. It was astounding the level to which young Harry had done his research and prepared for this interview. He was way beyond delving into areas that Dumbledore didn't want to explain to young Harry, particularly not when Severus was softening the boy up, teaching him some humility, breaking his spirit so it could be properly reformed. From what Dumbledore had observed of Harry and his

brute of an uncle, Severus' technique should be working better than it was...

"I'm afraid they never did, Harry. They came to some kind of truce early in their sixth year, if I remember correctly, and began dating when they were Head Boy and Head Girl. It was a long time ago..."

Harry didn't believe that for a second. This Dumbledore didn't seem like he forgot much, aside from utilizing common sense. He definitely was keeping some things back and outright lying about others. Harry really wanted an answer to this question, too, as he'd never felt the love of another and he was curious to know what it might feel like. Aunt and uncle hated him; his friends admired him; everyone else seemed in awe or in fear of him. It wasn't easy to understand emotions one has never felt.

"Did my parents leave a will, sir? My aunt and uncle refused to talk about them at all..."

Albus nodded. "Yes, there was a will, I'm sure. Like I said your father was picking up the pieces of a messy estate, I'm sure he would have put his own affairs into order. The goblins at Gringotts deal with that sort of thing. Maybe in a few years you could enquire and see what your parents' wrote..."

That was the last straw. Harry had now added this sad-sack Dumbledore's name to a mental list of enemies, 'adults' who needed firm handling. It wasn't a good list to be on. Quirrell, Snape, and the Dursleys (even Dudley) were the only other placeholders.

"The reason I ask, sir, is that Mr. Hagrid told me you wanted me to stay with the Dursleys. I wondered what my parents' had to say about that..."

"I wouldn't know," Dumbledore said, with a touch of firmness. This was precisely an area Dumbledore never wanted to discuss with the young Harry. What he'd done had been plainly illegal and he never planned to own up for his conduct. Never. Far too dangerous for a man with political offices like he had. A crime like that one, against this particular boy, could be enough to bring him down. Loss of

Hogwarts; loss of the Wizengamot; loss of his ICW membership and offices. He'd be finished politically, permanently.

"Never saw the document. Wasn't time. Voldemort was dead, of course, but his followers were still out in droves. Plus the well-wishers, those drunken revelers, they presented a danger, an accidental danger, all their own. Many things were happening and you needed to be safe, you understand..."

So this Dumbledore fellow had kidnapped him – or had Hagrid do that for him – and then he got away with it? And he was considered a 'good guy'? Why did his phoenix believe in him? And were witches and wizards all this blind and stupid? Dumbledore didn't even apologize for what he'd done. He seemed as monstrous as that Voldemort creature that Harry had supposedly killed as a baby.

"I see, sir. Well, what was supposed to keep me safe from my relatives, then?"

The question brought Dumbledore up short for a few moments. No, he could not admit he knew anything about the abuse. He could not admit that he had actually planned for it, to keep young Harry humble and meek; that he was now trying to duplicate it through Severus' good offices.

The world did not need another Voldemort: a powerful magical user working at the top of his skill level, with curiosity and drive and ambition. And with enough hatred to doom the entire world.

The world also did not need a Harry Potter raised by Sirius Black amid privilege and wealth and freedom. That wouldn't do.

No, the world needed this Harry, shy, polite, an indifferent student, and utterly incurious, save for what he could learn about his parents. Why the Granger girl had already asked for, and been denied, four passes to the Restricted Section. The Potter boy read household charms books and wizarding fairy tales because the school librarian had informed him that they were his parents' favorite kind of books. Yes, that was what was needed.



Dumbledore wasn't proud of what he had done and would never admit to any of it. But it was profoundly satisfying to look at this Harry – a shy, cautious, modestly curious Harry – and be assured that the world wasn't about to go up in flames again. Why, if he was anything even like Dumbledore himself – brilliant, arrogant, moderately powerful in the magical sense – and he got in league with another amoral power-luster like Gellert Grindelwald, World War III would be only the beginning of the utterly bleak story. No, the boy was too powerful to know the truth, too valuable to be allowed anger, too useful to be allowed free will.

Albus would lie now and then Memory Charm all this away later on, as soon as he figured out what to do with Sirius Black. He'd been thinking about it for months, but hadn't arrived at any good solutions.

Dumbledore leaned forward. "They love you, Harry. Your aunt is your mother's sister. They are your blood, Harry. She would never allow harm to come to you. Why do you think you need protection from them?"

Yes, this dunderhead was an 'adult.' He was lying right now. His eyes gave away a moment of utter fear at Harry's question. Dumbledore wasn't completely and totally blind, no, he was less than worthless. This monster knew exactly what the Dursleys did to him! He should never allowed to be near children, not ever, not as cruel and warped as he obviously was.

"Yes, Harry, you'll see when you return home to them this summer. They do love you, just as every parent loves his child, you know..."

Harry wanted to be sick. He would never live with the Dursleys again. Still, he decided to ask his final question, perhaps he might get a sensible answer for once.

"Sir, I wondered why you had my father's invisibility cloak? Thanks for returning it, by the way, Sirius told me all about it..."

"You're welcome, Harry." That was the best Dumbledore could do. He wouldn't tell Harry that he had coveted the power he recognized when James had worn that cloak as a student. That he now wanted

to feel that power again by having Harry wear it. It didn't respond at all to Dumbledore or anyone else he had had try it on. He had to return it to its rightful owner for that power to manifest itself once more.

And that was that. The meeting was to end with no answers, Harry knew. Harry's face, for just a fraction of a second, revealed precisely the level of annoyance he felt with this 'wise' old 'adult'. Another liar. Another one grasping for power by braking the backs of the young and defenceless. Another 'adult' who preached the truth and spoke only lies.

Sadly, for Dumbledore's sake, he didn't notice the gesture for what it was. Harry's partial invisibility fooled the old schoolmaster. His version of Harry sat reading fairy tales but not high level potions manuals; he checked out books on Quidditch strategy but not on advanced defensive magic. The old man would never remember this moment as a time to feel regret about. But this was the meeting that put his name on the list. Harry was no longer ambivalent about how to deal with Albus Dumbledore. It was now very dangerous to be named Albus, Severus, or Quirinus.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

February 1

Harry grasped the pieces of parchment in his hands with unrestrained anger. The force he applied to the parchment sheets would have been enough to accidentally tear had there not been so many stacked together at once.

Harry was reading the Last Will and Testament of James and Lily Potter. He wanted to kill.

The goblins had responded with reasonable speed in supplying him with the document once Harry had proved his identity. Now, Harry almost wished he could turn back time. In this case, it was better not to know.

The antipathy between Lily and Petunia was made clear in the document. The list of proper wizarding families who should be asked to care for Harry was quite extensive. Certainly not ever one of them had been killed or otherwise disqualified in the war.

Harry wanted to kill. But he wouldn't. Outright killing wasn't part of his rather perfect plan. Still, he'd feel better if he was able to wipe vibrantly red blood through that monster's long white beard.

It was true that there were worse things than death.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

February 6

The screaming coming from downstairs woke Harry up very late at night or very early in the morning. He had a very detailed idea why people were screaming, so he tried to roll over and return to sleep. But then someone yanked open his bed curtains.

"There's been an attack. They're saying the Chamber of Secrets has reopened..."

The sixth year prefect currently screaming at Harry was distraught and, strangely enough, excited at the same time. Gryffindors, really.

"What?"

"Three professors have been attacked. Petrified."

"Petrified? What kind of monster can petrify people?"

"No one knows."

Harry rolled his eyes. The legend of the Chamber of Secrets – it came in several different versions – said it held some kind of 'monster.' But it was obviously something long-lived and with the powers of petrification and killing. Thus, three options. And the only one Slytherin would have consorted with – and that had the kind of mobility to stalk students through the castle – was a basilisk. No one

thought of it because it wasn't supposed to petrify, only kill with its gaze, but it made sense. After all the attacks in the 1940s had involved one death and three petrifications. Did these people have no logic at all? The answer was sitting in a first year school textbook if anyone cared to look.

Harry got up and looked around his dorm room. He hadn't had long to sleep, after all, he'd been busy up until curfew the night before.

And, now, these three 'adults' reaped what they had sown. They'd been the last three at a scheduled teacher's meeting that ended late last night; Harry had waited for two weeks for the perfect timing to pull off his plot. And it worked. Dumbledore would never meddle in and ruin another child's life. Quirrell would never be parted from whatever spiritual parasite he was sharing his body with. Snape would never denigrate another pupil.

No Mandrake Potion would ever set them to rights, either. The three were under the joint influence of three different potions. The Soul Binding Draught, plus the Draught of Living Death and the Elixir of Petrification, was a most powerful cocktail. The only way to free them was to administer all the antidotes at once – and let's just remember that powdered moonstone and dragon blood explode when they come into contact, that was precisely the reason Harry had added the Soul Binding Draught to the cocktail. He needed potions that had completely incompatible cures. So, the three professors would either remain petrified for eternity or they would find their bodies exploded in an attempt to heal them. And that's only if people recognized what cocktail of potions had been used.

As Harry arose out of his musings, he saw that Seamus and Dean looked utterly baffled. Ron had gone back to sleep. And poor Neville looked like he was about to have a fit of some sort. Harry pointed the prefect over to start comforting Neville. Idiots!

Harry opened his trunk carefully and pulled out some clothing. He closed his trunk and carefully sealed it with a nonverbal spell. There was now one item inside his trunk he didn't want anyone to locate.

Harry had taken Dumbledore's wand as a souvenir; it was currently invisible inside his trunk. He'd left an appropriately transfigured twig, found outside while trudging back from Herbology, in its original place. It didn't appear to be like other wands – no there was something incredibly dangerous about it, not black like that book or like Quirrell, but powerful and dangerous nonetheless. The wand seemed to call to Harry now, but Harry could resist that, too.

It kept calling out that it was the “Elder Wand” and that Harry should want to use it. Perhaps one day Harry would, but for now he would stick to holly and phoenix feather.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

February 7

“Attention. Attention, everyone. Because of the petrifications Hogwarts School will be closing by order of the Board of Governors. The train will be coming tomorrow to transport all of the students back to London. Your parents or guardians have already been owled and some of them may elect to personally come and pick you up later today or early tomorrow. I'd suggest you all start packing now...”

Harry just moved out of the hall with everyone else after the Acting Headmistress finished her speech. He now listened to the gossip.

It seemed the Ministry had tried to rearrest Hagrid for opening the Chamber of Secrets, but it turned out the half-giant had a rather perfect alibi. He'd been so severely burned two nights before the petrifications happened that he had been sent to St. Mungo's for treatment. Just Hagrid's luck, his wooden hut burned down by a dragon he'd been caught raising – and it earned him a fine and a minor stint in a holding cell, rather than a serious accusation and a neverending sentence in Azkaban.

Harry believed none of it, save for the dragon breeding business. That would be in character. The part about Hagrid causing all of this Chamber business – now or fifty years prior – was pure ‘adult’ fantasy.

Harry followed a pair of third years back to the Tower. They were chattering away to each other and anyone else who would listen about that third floor forbidden corridor. Harry was intrigued.

“...and they called in the Aurors because they found a Cerberus behind a poorly locked door. Well, then they managed to stun the poor thing and haul it out, but then they found a trap door, you hear. And so a team went down it. Damned room was filled with Devil’s Snare, Fire-Wretching Bog Root, and Mammoth Venus Fly Traps. One guy apparently lost a few fingers – what a pain to regrow them.

“Then there was this gauntlet of traps. Some kind of charmed flying keys, all of them summon-proof, inside a room with a well-locked door. But each of the brooms supplied had a kind of curse on it – and no brooms brought from outside into the room would fly at all. One of the cursed brooms blinded its rider so long as he was on the broom. One made its rider violently nauseous; the third prevented the rider from breathing. Apparently the trick was to tether all three brooms together somehow and then try to fly them; that would override the curses. But the worst of it was that none of the keys in that room were the correct key. Dumbledore apparently had it around his neck when he was found petrified. The Aurors eventually just started battering away at the door. Magically exhausted two people doing it, too. Flitwick’s apparently quite a warding specialist, in addition to his skills in Charms and Duelling.

“The next room in this chamber of horrors was put together by McGonagall, they say. Kind of a maze without walls. Hundreds of small objects lying around seemingly in random places: chess pieces, water goblets, hanging racks of clothing, pieces of furniture, that sort of thing. Get too close to any one of them and it transfigures itself into a gargoyle and seizes you. Asks riddles, utterly insane ones, before they let you continue on. Who knew the old cat was that crazy?

“Then there was a room subdivided into twelve small stalls: a dangerous creature inside each one. Not only did they have a Cerberus to start off the overall gauntlet, they had a young Peruvian Vipertooth, a vampire in stasis, a massive troll, a banshee, a dementor, and god knows what else. All inside Hogwarts, here, right below us, that’s utterly mad, this is a school for Merlin’s sake. Each

stall had a key hidden inside it and it took six specific keys to open the next doorway. Damned thing was made from some stone made impervious to magic.

“Then came the worst room: eight man-sized cauldrons in a room, a bit of spare parchment with a little ditty on it. A logic puzzle and a test of sorts. All the green-colored potions in the cauldrons were different in effect and would only show their properties when lit. And the cauldrons would only light up when a person placed him or herself willingly inside it. Horrible. So a person had to figure out the puzzle and then crawl inside one of the cauldrons, light the fire, and hope the goop wouldn’t turn into an acid or a bone removing potion. Also bespelled to only work on humans, no house elves or animals. Utterly gruesome. And the right potion did a forced apparition of the person to a sealed stone room with nothing in it. Heavily warded, a strong magical presence coming from somewhere inside it, but nothing visible...It took the first person inside nine hours to batter down the walls to escape. The whole thing basically ruined most of a corps of Aurors for the next month.”

Harry smiled as the story ended. He and his fellow Gryffindors had just returned to the Tower.

He pondered the story and liked the part about the invisible magical presence in the final room. He had heard of Dumbledore’s fondness for the Fidelius Charm, the one that hadn’t saved his parents, the one that Voldemort had easily gotten around with a traitor, the one that had sent Sirius to prison. Sirius had explained it in some detail over the Christmas break. And Harry knew it was useful for hiding things or places or just pure knowledge, but wasn’t perfect. It could allow out magical leakage – or sounds – or smells. This sounded like whatever Dumbledore had hidden was under a Fidelius. Oh well, someone had better hope that Dumbledore shared the secret, otherwise the object would likely remain lost forever.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

February 24

Harry was due to start up lessons again tomorrow now that Sirius had been able to make arrangements. He was alone in his room playing with the thing that called itself the 'Elder Wand.' It really was quite a powerful piece of wood.

When Harry picked it up, it began whispering in his head. Ideas about power and control and magic. If Dumbledore had used this wand for years, with all this whispering and taunting, it wasn't a surprise he'd gone mostly insane. Harry wrapped the thing back up and stuffed it back in his trunk, disillusioning it again.

The wand might like Harry, but he had no interest in becoming another Dumbledore, not with a whispering wand telling him to get into crazy problems, to show off his prowess, to practically invite other people to attack him. Didn't Harry already have those sorts of problems as it was?

Had that wand driven Dumbledore insane? It seemed almost inevitable with such a voice whispering constantly like that.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

March 3

Harry much preferred his new life. Sirius and he were on the same wavelength. Years and years unjustly imprisoned gave one a rather healthy disrespect for authority figures, even above what Sirius might have been naturally inclined to feel. The pair now lived a few hours out of London. They used Number 12 Grimmauld for public meetings, like when Harry met with his tutor, Filius Flitwick. Hogwarts was still closed and its teachers had begun to take other positions. It was doubtful it would reopen any time soon, particularly given that the 'petrified' teachers couldn't be revived by any means.

Harry and Filius spent a few hours a week covering Charms, Transfiguration, and Defence. Harry liked Flitwick more as a tutor than as a simple Charms teacher because Flitwick was gifted with a wand as any dueling champion had to be. It was a bit of a crime just to leave him to teach levitation, scouring charms, and proper wrist movements.



Now Flitwick could show Harry things that Dumbledore hadn't permitted him to teach first year students. Harry loved it. He knew he'd need to find tutors eventually in the other subjects, plus catch up on his schooling from the muggle world. Harry had had enough of Hogwarts, enough of idiot 'adults' and their ridiculous notions. Harry wanted to finally be in control of his life – of his schooling, of his magic, of his past and present, of his thoughts and feelings.

Harry walked outside and got onto his broom and quickly zoomed into the air. He practiced and practiced magic, but he gave himself a few hours a day for fun, for goofing off, for pranking his godfather and the few friends he'd made at Hogwarts. They had all come out to visit at least once by now: Hermione, Fred and George, Neville, Seamus, and Dean. Ron had stopped being a friend around the time Sirius Black came into Harry's life – no great loss that.

It was quite a while later when Sirius arrived on his broom and tossed a quaffle at Harry. They played through a number of drills before Harry felt exhausted enough to call it a day.

"I had some news to share, Harry," Sirius said. "It seems your 'family,' those horrid Dursleys, died a few days ago. The Muggle authorities are chalking it up to a heater malfunction, noxious fumes or some rubbish. All three of them dead overnight, I heard."

Harry looked troubled for a second, then just nodded. Sirius knew how Harry and the Dursleys had loathed each other. Sirius then wrapped his arms around his godson and held him.

"I'm not going to their funerals, Sirius. They never loved me and I will never mourn them..."

Harry finished the rest of the thought silently... 'particularly as I sent them the potion to petrify them and turn their skin carbon monoxide red.' As if Vernon's boss would actually mail them a bottle of fine quality wine to enjoy. Gullible 'adults' and a spoiled whale of a child.

Harry felt a bit happy that Dudley had either been granted a glass or had snuck some from his parents. Although...it was strange Dudley

was home from Smeltings already. Had he failed out? Already? He was dumb, but not that dumb. No, it was more likely from bullying the other kids, taking their money or belongings. Dudley was a thug and Harry couldn't imagine a place called Smeltings wanting to be publicly associated with thugs.

Three when he'd only expected two. It was a plan well done.

Harry thought their being buried alive, but petrified and unable to move, was a fitting punishment for their years of neglect and abuse. 'They tucked me into a cupboard all those years, let's see how they enjoy being inside coffins and under several feet of earth.'

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

April 23

Harry and Sirius were now in Rome! With a view of the Tiber from their hotel room. And marble floors and an ancient elevator to get to their floor. Harry had never known that people could live this way. Everything was so old, so beautiful. Rome felt magical, even the Muggles seemed to feel it.

Flitwick had to call off a week's worth of lessons, so Sirius proposed a vacation. It was a wonderful thing. Harry had never been on a vacation. Sirius had been shocked and more than angry when Harry had mentioned it.

"But we should do more than have fun, Sirius. We can make it 'educational,' if you catch my meaning."

They'd started off their Marauder's tour by visiting sites important to Voldemort's first campaign and destroying them, burning them up. Two buildings in Little Hangleton went up in flames four nights ago; something in one of them seemed to be causing a loud keening wail. Harry and Sirius had heard this noise a few times now: the diary and the locket. It was a good, reassuring sound.

Three nights ago, they'd torched Borgin and Burkes in Knockturn Alley because it likely housed Death Eater accounts or relics of

Voldemort's first war. The plan had been a beautiful one. Sirius had polyjuiced himself and walked in that morning and browsed a bit. He managed to dump some powder into one of the Everlit Fire Goblets on display. He also managed to deftly disable the internal fire suppression runes inside the store; made it appear that the rune had been out of commission for ages. Then that night, Sirius and Harry had stood on the Muggle side of the doorway to Knockturn Alley and they unleashed an earthquake trembler, strong enough to throw every kind of merchandise from the shelves in the whole Alley. The store burned without any seeming human intervention. The other stores didn't receive a lick of damage as their fire suppression runes actually worked properly.

Rome, though, that was for fun. Harry had been amazed when Sirius drug him through the Vatican and then through a number of magical museums throughout the city. Who knew that the Vatican's ancient Castel sant'Angelo was actually a museum dedicated to magical persons and horrors such as the Spanish Inquisition. Who knew there was this kind of history waiting to be seen?

Then there was the food. Pasta, cheeses, gelato, saltimbocca alla Romana, wild boar, Harry had never tried as many wonderful things in his life. And the vendor stall pizza, thin Margherita with very little cheese and a lot of basil, incredible. Up to that point, Harry hadn't known anything outside of Britain and very little of what was inside his native country at that.

Sirius had decided that he and Harry should learn Italian, thus their trip to Rome to have some fun and engage a teacher of Latin and Italian. Sirius had it all planned out. Italian first, the magical way; then French; then German; then... He had big eyes and a big stomach and he wanted to justify his trips by calling them Marauder educational opportunities.

Harry just laughed and went along. He hadn't met any 'adults' on this trip yet. It was all a load of good fun.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

June 7

Harry now had four tutors total. Flitwick still did most of his wand-based subjects. He now had a tutor in muggle and magical history, plus English literature and writing; another one on mathematics and sciences; and a fourth for potions and herbology. Sirius was still looking for someone who could teach Harry runes, warding, and arithmancy.

Plus Harry was working on his Italian lessons by owl post and floo. His tutor would quiz him over the floo once per week and Harry often went with Sirius into one of the coffee shops near SoHo where most of the patrons spoke Italian. It was good practice.

And it sounded like Sirius' friend Remus would begin tutoring Harry in a few other subjects come August: wizarding traditions, politics, and various obscure branches of magic. Remus had obviously been quite the bookworm at school.

Harry heard the door downstairs open and close. Sirius must have returned from his first meeting of the Wizengamot.

Harry wandered down to see his godfather in his garish, but still official robes.

"Shame the bunch of them?"

Sirius laughed. "Not many of the fools could look me in the eyes, I tell you."

"Anything interesting happen?"

"Well, last meeting they awarded me compensation for wrongful damages and returned the Black seat to active status. This time they tried and convicted Barty Crouch for his role in illegally denying me a trial. It seems they also found out an interesting thing: he'd been holding his own son, the one who was supposed to be buried at Azkaban, in a basement room of his house..."

Harry frowned. "How many 'adults' are there in this world? Can't anyone think here? Law enforcement official wants his son out of prison, so he just does it?" Harry growled in frustration.

"There were some things of interest. All the fear about what happened with that Chamber of Secrets – particularly the loss of Dumbledore – got them to enact some silly laws. All convicted Death Eater estates have to have all their vault contents melted down, plus their homes searched. People not convicted of being Death Eaters – or pardoned – are being reinterviewed and questioned. All wizarding houses will get at least a brief inspection.

"Lucius Malfoy positively ran out of the hearing room when that passed. I suspect he's planning on fleeing the country or something because his dear friend Fudge couldn't stop the legislation from passing. Good riddance to bad rubbish. I'm sure he's at the very top of the Aurors' list to interview."

Harry laughed. "It sounds like even 'adults' can smell the foulness in the air once in a great while."

"Fear is a great motivator, Pup."

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

July 1

"...no, it's the Potter School of Magic."

"Bah, Sirius, it's the Black School of Magic."

"That's almost as bad as calling it the School of Black Magic, no way."

"Fine. The Sirius School of Magic. Hah!"

"Maybe. How about the Sirius School of Serious Magic."

"That's awful. Why do you think that's funny?"

“I don’t know. Maybe because it is?”

The pair were having a childish argument about a childish sign they were preparing for the front hall of 12 Grimmauld Place. It seemed that news of Harry’s tutors had leaked out and a few of his friends had inquired about taking lessons with Harry.

So, classes would start on August 1. Five hours of subjects per day; three hours of fun and free time.

Harry was looking forward to better teachers in history and potions. Smaller lessons and faster progression in charms and transfiguration. No stuttering in Defence. Plus a twice weekly lesson on English language and literature and a return to learning about his former school subjects like math and science.

It was being geared to run quite a bit faster than the Hogwarts curriculum, too, what with only seven pupils to a teacher.

Plus flying, Quidditch, muggle football, and other fun things every single day.

Harry was ecstatic.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

August 2

Harry had a massive smile on his face. He loved the new Sirius School. He finally enjoyed being with other children because they could act like they wanted – none of the pretensions of houses or a drafty castle to interfere with them or incompetent or dangerous teachers. No detentions and worthless essays. Oh, Harry still wrote papers, but not because the teacher was in a fit. And someone finally taught Harry how to actually write an essay. Apparently the folks at Hogwarts just assumed everyone already could.

Hogwarts, what a mediocre joke.

It was only the best school for magic in Britain because it was the only one. Flitwick, Sprout, and McGonagall, in that order, were the only decent teachers there, as the Astronomy teacher had her head in the stars and not on her charges and Harry hadn't met any of the teachers who worked in the elective subjects...but if they'd had Quirrell teaching Muggle Studies the year prior, it couldn't be a good class.

Even worse, the castle was actually a hazardous location.

Harry loved the fact that the Aurors had spent three weeks tearing Hogwarts apart rooting out dark artifacts and looking for the Chamber of Secrets. They'd found tons of dark objects hidden in various places, especially in what was referred to as the Room of Requirement. It sounded like a giant junk heap, literally a thousand years' worth of broken and misplaced objects. Sirius had heard that some of what was found was so black that it was immediately destroyed, even over the protests of the Unspeakables.

And, as they announced today, they had finally discovered the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets in a girl's lavatory, the same one where 'Lockhart' had killed Umbridge. They were still attempting to locate the 'monster,' whatever it was. It seemed no one had yet realized they would be facing a basilisk.

Fred and George came through the floo on the main floor and were jabbering at each other.

"Percy's still moaning about not being a prefect any longer..."

"...because we certainly don't listen to him and Charlie would hex him into mothballs if he tried his perfect prefect act around him."

"Bill might only lock him into the tool shed for a few days with some bizarre Egyptian locking charm."

"And darling Ronniekins couldn't care less if he ever returned to school, so long as he gets seven meals a day..."

"...and someone to clean the snot off his chin."

Harry laughed at them. The twins were eager to take lessons once they'd learned Remus' and Sirius' nicknames from their school days. They were trying to arrange for special lessons with Sirius, lessons on pranking and mayhem.

Harry laughed again when they began plotting openly about how to impress Sirius.

"Be subtle, guys, be very subtle. You've got to trick Sirius into teaching you this or that, it's the only sporting way, you know..."

That was actually how Harry had learned a number of things, not least of which was actually how to perform those fire spells hot enough to destroy dark objects, like that diary. It wasn't exactly useful for pranking, but it certainly was useful.

"Alright then, young Potter..."

"...how do you propose we do such a thing?"

Harry smiled. "Pay attention in history class. Find a story in there that interests you, some battle or siege of a town, something. Then ask Sirius how you might recreate one of the effects that was mentioned about it, like how the trapped townspeople conjured up rubber chickens to throw at the conquering forces. Sirius will see through your little story, but it will amuse him, you know, and he'll probably help you out..."

"Brilliant."

It was all part of Harry's plot to make his fellow students more careful and more cunning. He'd had the hardest time convincing that horrible sorting hat not to send him to Slytherin last year. His winning argument: "I'm too cunning for those morons." The hat had acquiesced and sent him to Gryffindor.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

August 9



Sirius was laughing. What a glorious sound. Harry wandered up from the kitchen to see what had Sirius in stitches.

“What now?”

“Oh Pup, it’s terrible and hysterical at the same time. I just heard...”  
He burst into laughter again. “I just heard from an Auror friend that they went to arrest Fudge...”

“Fudge? He’s a moron, but what did he do to deserve arresting?”

“Corruption. One or more of the exiled families, those who fled to Albania, must have sent back some of Fudge’s bank records. The ones that showed off larger deposits than should be made on a Minister’s official and legal salary. The Head of Magical Law Enforcement thought there was a case, so she sent in the Aurors to arrest him. Well, the old fool panicked. He reached for something in his pocket. The Aurors stunned him thinking he was trying to draw his wand, that knocked him into a wall, and then the portkey Fudge was going for misfired. It only took his hand and arm...”

“Gross, Sirius. That’s so gross. Can portkeys often misfire like that?”  
Harry was shivering in disgust and a bit of nervousness. He didn’t think he would like portkeys.

“Sometimes, if they’re hit with foreign magic just as they’re being used. But, now Fudge is without an arm and he’s being held under arrest at St. Mungo’s. The Wizengamot meets tomorrow to begin hearing nominations to replace Fudge.”

“Well, you know what I say. No one like that horrible Crouch; no one like Fudge. And no one like that whacked out Umbridge woman. I wonder if there are decent adults, aside from you and Remus, living in Britain...”

“I know a few, Pup. I’ll make sure at least one gets on the ballot.”

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

August 17

A solemn looking Sirius and Remus greeted Harry when he awoke. "What'd you two break now," Harry asked, irritable at being stared at.

"There's news. Good news. Terrible news."

"Are you teaching Divination now, Sirius? You sound like you're feeding me a load of corn mush..."

Remus broke his solemn face a bit.

"They found Pettigrew," Remus said. "Alive. Hiding in plain sight, Harry. You might have seen him yourself at one point..."

Harry thought for a second. Hiding. Plain sight. Wormtail. Rat, in plain sight. "Ron's rat?"

Sirius finally nodded. "I wanted to personally kill him but the Aurors already had him in a cell. They'd been out doing a perfunctory on the Weasley house when they discovered an animagus with one of their detection spells. They tested all the owls, Ginny's cat, the ghoul in the attic (didn't know it was possible to become a ghoul as an animagus), a half dozen other critters that were inside the wards, a few dozen garden gnomes, and then Ron's rat. Voila."

Harry smiled at that. This was the man-rat who'd betrayed Harry, his parents, and everyone else. Now he would finally face some justice.

"Why are you sad about that?"

Remus answered. "Well, I think Sirius wanted to be the one to kill Peter." At this Sirius smiled a bit. "But the problem is that in the current fearful climate, Arthur Weasley lost his job at the Ministry for not catching Pettigrew right under his nose. His son Percy had the beast for years, then Ron had it. They're saying it should have been obvious that a rat doesn't live for twelve years, not a normal rat at least..."

Harry rolled his eyes again. More ‘adult’ overreaction. People weren’t seers or prophets or supersleuths. Most people never gave much thought at all to their children’s pets – or to their orphaned nephews – so it was a perfect place to hide.

“...he was also one of the top candidates to become Minister. Now it looks like it’s down to the Head Auror, a blithering idiot named Scrimgeour, or a nice, efficient, friendly, but not very bright Amos Diggory.”

Harry remembered meeting a kid named Cedric. The girls thought he looked pretty, but he didn’t seem to have a lot going on upstairs. Must be genetics at work. Or he could have been hiding in much the same way Harry did. Hmm.

“Well, I’ll start packing. We can move to France if we need to, Sirius.”

Sirius laughed. “Nah, we could just fade out, hide ourselves, and wait for competent folks to figure out what’s what. The Black Family has some fairly interesting family wards available, you know...”

“I didn’t,” Harry said. “But now I’ll expect to learn them in a few years. Okay, out now, I need to get up and get dressed for the day.”

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

September 1

Classes were a blast. The world seemed alright, finally. Lucius Malfoy – he of that evil book – had been found dead in Albania drained of his blood. The Muggles who’d found him had chopped off his head and burned his body. No one wanted a Malfoy vampire lurking around, it seemed, not even Muggles who knew nothing about the man.

Remus was a blast in classes. Sirius was beginning to tutor Harry on the side about ‘finding his inner animal.’ Flitwick was still quite good and entertaining. All in all, a great kind of school.

The Weasleys were back on their feet again. Arthur had found a new position in the Ministry, no longer a department head, of course, but

the new Minister, Dirk Cresswell, took pity on him. With the family now home schooling their children, save Fred and George, it was back to being in financial balance.

For the first time in a long time, Harry forgot about the plans he'd made at the Dursleys. He was enjoying himself too much here. He liked Sirius and Remus. He liked his new life. He also liked knowing he didn't have to become an 'adult' as he aged, Sirius certainly hadn't. But, most of all, Harry liked knowing that his Life Lessons had saved him. Quirrell was gone, as were Snape and Dumbledore. His life was set right; he didn't have to be so calculating and cunning, but he knew he could sharpen his claws and do it all again should the need arise.

Harry didn't even notice that he wasn't taking the Hogwarts Express this year. He would actually never return to the school. Harry Potter would also never be an 'adult,' that much was clear.

Harry would just be Harry.